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ABSTRACT

A functional reading program, as distinct from the standard middle school reading program, specifically ensures that all students will acquire the reading skills necessary for survival in our society. Survival reading behaviors to be achieved include the ability to read labels on packages, to locate references in a newspaper, or to translate financial agreements such as sales slips. The material for the program must be interesting, pertinent, and stimulating. It must also include a range of ability levels. A specific plan of action has four steps: program definition, needs assessment, implementation, and evaluation. To assess needs, individual test scores are used. Implementation involves giving instruction in following directions, locating references, attaining personal development, gaining information, and understanding forms. After each instructional area is completed, students take posttests which indicate possible needed changes in presentation and instruction. (TJ)

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TITLE: AN IMPLEMENTATION OF A FUNCTIONAL READING PROGRAM

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Susan M. Blair

INTRODUCTION

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

A good middle school reading program:

- assumes each child success in learning to read up to the level of his ability;
- provides for a variety of learning -teaching methods to satisfy his learning needs;
- provides the child with time in school to enjoy reading;
- provides for a variety of materials, equipment, and books;
- assures each child a degree of competency in study skills necessary for him to be successful in school.

This is a reflection of a standard program of reading instruction.

However, within the past few years, a new aim for reading programs has become influential in reading research. The name generally accepted for this instruction is Functional Reading or Survival Reading.

FUNCTIONAL READING

The Maryland State Department of Education developed a functional reading program which ensures all students will acquire the skills necessary for survival in our society. "This program was designed to be an integral part of the ongoing reading program in each school."¹

Functional Reading (as it will be called throughout this report) refers to the range of materials available to the general public. These materials are

¹ Division of Instruction, Maryland State Department of Education, Functional Reading - A Resource Guide for Teachers. I (Baltimore, Maryland State Department of Education, 1975-76), p. 1

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not simply textbooks, but "real" print and nonprint media.

Sixth Graders are becoming increasingly aware of the outside world. Therefore, it is necessary to offer some materials that reflect the wide range of interests and abilities. Due to a common lack of motivation to read, the material must be interesting, pertinent, and stimulating. Another major item in material selection is the range of ability levels.

CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

In order to accommodate the above prerequisites, it is important to follow a specific plan of action. The steps to be followed are:

- 1.) Program Definition
- 2.) Needs Assessment
- 3.) Implementation
- 4.) Evaluation

Throughout each of these steps, additional strategies will be developed.

1.) Program Definition

A functional reading program has the following characteristics:

- A. It identifies the essential survival reading behaviors to be achieved, such as the ability to interpret labels on packages, to locate references within a newspaper, or to translate financial agreements such as sales slips.
- B. It identifies levels at which the essential survival reading behaviors are learned, reinforced, and observed.
- C. It accounts for the individual differences by the timing, pacing, and differentiating of tasks.
- D. It directs all students toward reading material at the basic level,

proceeding as quickly as possible toward independent lifetime usage.²

This program will be incorporated into the already existing sixth grade reading instructional program.

2.) Needs Assessment

In determining the need for such a program, background information should be reviewed.

There are numerous standardized test scores in addition to classroom teacher observation. For each sixth grade student, the available Educational Development Series Scholastic Test scores of non-verbal, reading, and language are tallied. Because of transfer students, the Gates-MacGinitie Achievement Reading Test was given by the classroom teacher. From this test, a vocabulary score and a comprehension score are recorded.

Each sixth grade teacher was given a questionnaire regarding his students' abilities in performance in the goal area. (See Appendix A).

After reviewing the aforementioned scores and results, each sixth grade student was administered the Five Goal Area Pre-Test. This final test was the primary source for specific skill instruction. Each area was reinforced in subsequent instruction.

3.) Implementation

The instructional phase of the functional reading program began in two direct methods.

First, each reading class was scheduled for instruction in one of the five goal areas. These goal areas correlated with the program definition. They

² Ibid., p. 4.

are: 1) Following Directions; 2) Locating References; 3) Attaining Personal Development; 4) Gaining Information; 5) Understanding Forms. This lesson was taught by the reading specialist. Prior to the lesson, the classroom teacher had a copy of the entire lesson plan including objective, materials, procedure, and follow-up activity. Using this, the classroom teacher was able to understand the appropriate teaching technique for Functional Reading Instruction.

The second portion for implementation was devoted to the classroom teacher preparation. As a continuation of the above model lesson, each classroom teacher planned and projected the objectives to be expanded. These itemized objectives were under the guideline of one of the five goal areas.

The time for this teacher preparation was incurred during faculty meetings; in-service half-day sessions; team-teacher in-service meetings; and consultation periods with the reading specialist.

Some activities to be included were ideas exchange; material preparation; and suggestions for reinforcement of the lessons in the content areas.

b.) Evaluation

Consistency is the key word in the evaluative process. Throughout the steps in planning, assessing, and implementing, suggestions were accepted and reviewed. Of utmost importance was the post-test, which the sixth grade students took after each goal instructional period. In this manner, any needed change in presentation and instruction was forthcoming. The test results were an added component to the need for a continuation of Functional Reading instruction in the Sixth Grade Reading Program.

SUMMARY

Ideally, the comparisons of the Pre-Test and the Post-Test were to display a percentage of growth for the average sixth grade student.

Realistically, it was necessary to examine per item growth. An example is an increase in Goal 1 (Following Directions) and a decrease in Goal 4 (Gaining Information).

Any gain was naturally of major concern in preparation of other instructional units. Perhaps availability of material and teacher input may be factors in revision of the Functional Reading Unit. These are just two elements that may prove to be prominent in a second edition of this proposal.

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List of Standardized Tests

Educational Development Series Scholastic Test, Elementary Level
(Bensenville: Scholastic Testing Service, 1973).

Gates - MacGinitie Reading Test Survey D, Form M
(New York: Teachers College Press, 1965).

APPENDIX A

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to accommodate your class for instruction in the Functional Reading Skills Instructional Program, please complete the following questionnaire.

Answer each question based on your students' abilities in the five goal areas.

1. Following Directions
 - A. Can each student understand directions given in sequential order?
 - B. Can each student read cautions on labels?
2. Locating References
 - A. Can each student locate references within a single resource?
 - B. Can each student locate references within a multi-volume resource?
3. Attaining Personal Development
 - A. Is his personal development geared to gain personal satisfaction?
 - B. Is his personal development geared to acquire additional knowledge?
4. Gaining Information
 - A. Can each student use information needed in his school?
 - B. Can each student use information needed in his home?
5. Understanding Forms
 - A. Can each student interpret forms for reporting personal information?
 - B. Can each student interpret financial agreements?

Any questions or comments with regard to the Functional Reading Program would be appreciated.

Please return this no later than (date).